

Chase Me Through The Streets of Time

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Chase Me Through The Streets of Time

by [janewithwhy](#)

Summary

Every time, she thinks she'll recognize her.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

She remembers lying in an itchy cot, springs in the weak mattress digging into her side, painfully. All the injections they gave her for her amputated leg weren't enough to keep the fever at bay, or the infection from spreading, or the pain from ripping awful moans from her lips.

This is the first time she remembers her—war torn, badly broken, in a state of delirium. When Satsuki looks up at the nurse putting more morphine into her veins, she grabs hold of her wrist and chokes down a whimper. Her vision clouds, and she swears the pretty nurse with the sandy blonde hair, whose name she can't remember, looks almost familiar. The pretty nurse coaxes her to let go, and inserts the needle into her arm, before straightening her back and wiping a strand of lighter blond hair out of her face.

Satsuki's mouth feels dry and she tries to reach for the nurse again, but her arm is heavy and although she knows that leg is gone, it itches. Satsuki feels the corner of her mouth twitch, trying to make a sound. The nurse's blue eyes look sadly back into her own and when Satsuki goes to sleep, she doesn't wake up.

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Five.

That's how many lives she's lived that she remembers, now. It doesn't help, remembering any of them—they're never connected; the timelines are all jumbled up or different completely, and every time she passes a stranger on the street (or alley, or boat deck) that she remembers from that life or that life or that life, none of them seem to know her.

It's not like she's born with the memories of getting caught in a war—not like she's learned to hold a gun at the same time she learns how to crawl, or speak in French when her parents coo at her in Portuguese, or do somersaults by the time she's walking. It's a gradual remembering that starts by the time she hits puberty, where she has dreams of an ocean that seems different than the one she walks along. Or how she suddenly knows the word "nostalgia" in some forgotten, dead language in her current timeline. Or how, when she's older and wraps her fingers around the trigger of a gun, her hands feel calloused by years and years with which she has not yet lived.

By then it's like a dam breaking open. Memories of familiar faces in different clothes that speak in different languages hit her so long as she allows them to roll in, and when she sleeps, the turbines are open and they spill into her like never ending movies. But they do not scare her, not anymore, not the way they did by the fourth life. Now she's on number six, and while some memories still hit her hard (the pain of losing an amputated leg or getting caught in a fight and coming out with two broken ribs), she mostly just muses on them in passing.

She's trying to think which timeline she remembers the male barista (a gigantic, hulking blonde man) from when a body obscures her view.

"Is this seat taken?"

Satsuki looks up into blue eyes that seem familiar, somehow. A petite brunette with a coy smile on her face is leaning against the tabletop, gesturing at the chair in front of her.

“No,” Satsuki offers, expecting the woman to walk off with it and join any number of tables that are currently occupied. The woman just sits down in front of her, a grin spreading across her lips, and Satsuki is taken aback.

“You by yourself? You’re really pretty, you know that?”

Satsuki blinks. “I—yes. And thank you?”

“Matoi? Matoi?!” the male barista shouts. The brunette spins her head around.

“Oh! Be right back,” she says, before roughly pushing her chair back and going over to the counter. When she comes back she sets down a green tea frappuccino in front of Satsuki and she’s already biting on the straw of her black iced coffee.

“I see you come in here sometimes,” she shrugs. Suddenly embarrassed, she adds, “Not like I’m stalking you or some bullshit.” She blushes. “I mean, pardon my French. But you know. I’ve seen you around.”

Satsuki just smiles, and holds out her hand. “Satsuki.”

The brunette takes it gladly—she smiles and Satsuki swears her blue eyes sparkle.

“Ryuko.”

After five lives, it is the sixth that she spends living just to live. It is the sixth that she learns to not look back, to close the turbines, and to live with a girl whose blue eyes she knows she’s seen before.

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They barely meet in the seventh. Satsuki looks out for her, constantly. By the time she’s an adult, she can’t keep her job; she’s always moving from place to place and she’s anxious all the time. Dreams of Ryuko sleeping in her bed and tracing lazy patterns across her skin slip into her timeline like a leaky faucet—always dripping no matter how tight she thinks she’s closed the tap.

Sometimes she’s on the subway and she thinks she hears Ryuko’s laugh.

Sometimes she’s at a bar, trying to meet new people, and she thinks she catches a glint of those same blue eyes.

The other lives don’t slip in so much. She trades the memory of holding a rifle for holding hands with Ryuko. She remembers the time she broke her ribs, but can’t feel the break, not when she remembers being 30 and married with somebody who makes her ugly-laugh all the time. In this timeline, it’s not until she’s 35 that she decides to go to therapy, tries to settle down in her life, tries to not dwell on whether or not she missed her, somehow.

It's awkward, but not impossible to tell her therapist about her.

"I just—I think I'm stuck on somebody."

Satsuki doesn't tell her therapist—an energetic, brunette whose head looks a little bit like a coconut—that that somebody isn't actually real. She doesn't have to, because it feels real, and this is her seventh life that she remembers, so even though they feel like dreams, Satsuki knows for certain that somehow she's remembering things that have happened before.

One day, Satsuki's session runs over and her therapist apologetically tells her it's time to go and that she has another patient waiting. Satsuki understands, and she rises to thank her therapist, who gives her a tight hug and says she looks forward to their talk next week. She's still thanking her therapist and walking out the door when she knocks into the next patient.

"I'm so sorry," Satsuki says, bowing slightly. When she straightens she looks into blue eyes that she recognizes. It almost sends her into a panic attack before she realizes that the vacant look in this girl's gaze is definitely not one of recognition.

"C'mon in, Ryuko," her therapist says, taking the girl (whose hair is blonde again, but shaggy, her clothes disarray, and that sad distant look in her eyes still prevalent despite her gaze shifting towards the patterned carpet) into her office. Her therapist mouths a sorry and gives Satsuki a thumbs up, before shutting the door.

Satsuki stands there for what seems like hours before she shakes her head and leaves.

She tries to love somebody else, but she can't. And after two years with the same therapist, Satsuki never sees Ryuko again.

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The eighth is hard and war torn, again. Satsuki doesn't make it past 25.

Ryuko is in her platoon, and she is brunette again, screaming and crying, trying to staunch the flow of blood that's coming out of Satsuki's chest after a bullet shot straight through it. When she tried to wipe her hair from her face, a streak of Satsuki's blood colored her bangs red.

Satsuki never even got to tell her she loved her, though she did. Satsuki never even got to ask where she grew up, this time. They never kissed. They never hugged. The only things they shared were canned meats and steely glances, huddled in trenches to avoid the cold with eight others.

But they do hold hands.

As Satsuki bleeds out on the cold hard ground and Ryuko's blue eyes fill with tears, Ryuko clutches her hand. Satsuki reasons that she's probably more afraid that their platoon leader is dying over the fact that it's her that's dying. She coughs blood and feels guilt mingle with pain—she hates to leave Ryuko alone in enemy territory.

She wants to say that she'll see her again. She wants to let her know it'll be okay. She wants to let her know that they'll find each other again—that she's never forgotten the way her blue

eyes shimmer. But there's shrapnel in her lungs and blood in her throat and she can't make a sound except a disgusting croak. And besides, Satsuki isn't so sure. Will she see her again? Will there be a next time?

Satsuki reaches for Ryuko's wrist, reminded of the first time she remembers her. The edges of her vision blurs as she coughs once more.

"Ryuko."

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Nine and ten are so different but so similar in origin that Satsuki sometimes has a hard time distinguishing which timeline came first.

Ryuko's her next-door neighbor. In nine, it's because Satsuki's father has to move out of the city for work and the little girl that hides behind her mother's knees as their parents introduce themselves has such pretty eyes that Satsuki blurts it out, at the age of five.

"Daddy, I like her eyes," she says, tugging at her father's pants. The adults still and laugh, Satsuki's father ruffling her head as he does so. This is nine. It's full of laughter, but Ryuko does not love her in nine the way she loved her in six. She is blonde. She marries a girl with pink hair and they have one child. Satsuki is that child's godmother.

It takes until nine for her to stop thinking that hair color is a factor in whether or not she will love her, because she realizes that there are different kinds of love in this world.

In ten, they're neighborhood hooligans.

By the time they reach high school, Ryuko's already smoking cigarettes and Satsuki's used to the feeling of being drunk. Ryuko's hair is jet-black and by the time Satsuki is a senior, her memories of prior lives are coming back to her. She can't tell if Ryuko loves her or not. But they have sex, a lot of it; the kind that makes both parties bleed in fury, that leads to angry red welts down their backs and thighs, the kind where they play a game and the goal of that game is to draw the first noise from the other party.

Sometimes Satsuki wins.

Sometimes Ryuko wins.

Ten is cut short by an overdose.

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Satsuki tries not to think about eleven because eleven is really weird.

They're long lost sisters in eleven, and they fight a lot, and the mention of Satsuki's mother in this timeline leaves a bitter taste in her mouth.

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They have three timelines a row together. Twelve, thirteen, and fourteen are bliss.

In each one, they find each other. Twelve and fourteen they find each other in earlier years—but twelve is the first one that Satsuki has to continue on without Ryuko after meeting her, which surprises her. It's during twelve, when she's aged and their two children are gone from the home, adults in their own right, that Satsuki lets the memories wash over her like continuous ocean waves. Even though she counts this as twelve, a part of Satsuki wonders if maybe there are timelines she's missing, timelines Ryuko exists but she doesn't, timelines she can't recall.

Again, she wonders if this is the last time she'll meet Ryuko, if this is all they have. Twelve is such a pleasant break from eleven that Satsuki can't help but wonder if maybe she's done playing some cosmic, karmic game and after this her life will fade to nothing.

In thirteen, she's almost convinced that she jinxed herself until she meets Ryuko again, later on in life, each having their own children through separate means (it took until thirteen for Satsuki to try to have relationships with other people, this one a short, blonde woman who reminded Satsuki of Ryuko's pink-haired wife in nine). Satsuki spends the latter half of thirteen apologizing for things Ryuko does not know about—it is the timeline where Satsuki is the most apologetic. Ryuko just rolls her eyes and makes jokes.

“Jeez, Eyebrows, it's like you're apologizing for a past life—calm the hell down. I don't care that you spilled coffee on my jacket.”

In fourteen, Ryuko is the one from a more affluent family. As Satsuki's memories come back to her in high school, Ryuko drives them along coastlines, showing Satsuki her favorite places to watch the sunset. Satsuki can't remember which spot they finally kiss at, but she does know that when they do, it brings back the memory of six so fast, it makes her head reel.

Ryuko looks at her funny.

“What's the matter? I'm not that bad am I? Oi, you look like you've seen a ghost.”

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A funny thing happens in fifteen.

Satsuki's in high school and her memories come back in a rush, night after night. She's asked to babysit for friends of her mother's because she's responsible and she agrees because she needs the extra cash, but when she meets the seven year old that she has to spend the night with, all she can do is laugh.

Ryuko hates board games and wants to watch TV the entire time, and Satsuki is so aggravated with the child that she just lays down on the floor and groans while contemplating phoning her parents and backing out.

“Satsuki.”

“What, Ryuko?”

Satsuki turns her head and looks toward the voice. Seven years old and Ryuko is definitely the person from Satsuki's memories.

"Uhm, I'm sorry if I made you mad," she says, sheepishly. It causes Satsuki to smile and sit up. "I just... momma and papa are gone a lot and you're fun!"

The flinch that should have appeared on Satsuki's face quickly turned into a sad smile. Satsuki spends fifteen being a careful mentor to the girl, going so far as to curse out a bunch of high school bullies nearly ten years later.

Satsuki marries again, in this timeline, and when she makes Ryuko hold her child, she sees six, and nine, and twelve, and thirteen, and fourteen, all at once.

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Sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen are painful for different reasons.

They miss each other completely in sixteen. Satsuki never knows her, never meets her, but she doesn't spend sixteen the way she spent seven. How could she? Satsuki reasons that, even if fifteen was the last time (she's always wondering when will be the last time), she's had more good lifetimes with Ryuko than anybody else gets to say about the person they love. At least, that she knows of.

So she spends sixteen in a completely different way than any other timeline. Where she was hard and composed in the others, she spends sixteen being soft and spontaneous, delving into art and painting. She writes books about a girl who may or may not be in this timeline and they sell. People she's never met (or maybe has) send her letters about the realness of her words. She briefly wonders if she's taking advantage of her memories, but it's also in sixteen that she realizes how absolutely lucky she is.

Every day hurts, though, and Satsuki can't bring herself to be with anybody else in this timeline.

Even though they miss each other and even though she's lucky, Satsuki is almost glad for sixteen to finish.

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Seventeen is hard as well, but that's because Satsuki does meet Ryuko, but only in passing. In seventeen, Satsuki tries photography as her medium. She's 27 and waiting to bump into Ryuko when she does. They're traveling, all three of them—Satsuki, Ryuko, and Ryuko's boyfriend, a handsome blind man with little tact who says vulgar things. They meet on a train headed out toward the countryside.

He makes Ryuko laugh and it churns centuries worth of bitterness in Satsuki's stomach. He makes her happy, and the memory of ribs breaking so long ago comes back painfully, for the first time in many timelines.

Satsuki could never have anticipated that Ryuko could be with anybody else—anybody else that made her happy like this. It was different in nine, because Satsuki knew that Ryuko loved her then—but seventeen hurts like a twisted knife.

Ryuko doesn't know Satsuki in this timeline and worst of all, doesn't care to.

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Satsuki would take eighteen over seventeen timeline and timeline again, although she'd prefer to take neither.

Technology was slow to catch up in eighteen—they still used lanterns and torches. They carried around swords and wore chainmail. It'd been a while since Satsuki had been displaced so much, but it didn't matter: knowing the timelines never really helped her.

Satsuki became a guard for a castle, which was fine, and she would have liked to meet Ryuko there, but eighteen had different plans for them.

She awoke with a sharp pain in her side and a hand covering her mouth. Blue eyes glinted in the moonlight staring into her own as the dagger twisted and Satsuki tried to cry out. Her hair was black, that's what Satsuki remembered. Ryuko rolled off of her and padded silently toward the exit—Satsuki was supposed to sound an alarm, intruders in the castle, but she couldn't.

“Ryuko.”

It caused the woman pause and she glanced back at Satsuki, bleeding at her post. Before her eyes slipped shut, Satsuki thought she saw a look of recognition.

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“Satsuki.”

“Hmm?”

Light floods her eyes when she opens them—this is nineteen. She's lying on the couch with Ryuko standing over her, behind the armrest, holding a mug of tea. Satsuki lets out a low chuckle. And sits up.

“Did you fall asleep?” Ryuko asks, handing Satsuki the mug and leaning in to kiss her.

“No,” Satsuki says pulling away, holding the mug between both of her palms. Ryuko scoots in next to her and puts her head on Satsuki's shoulder. Nineteen is nice, easy, lazy. It's a lot better than eighteen—technology is back to Satsuki's comfort level.

“What do you think about reincarnation?”

Satsuki pauses and then looks at Ryuko—in all of the timelines, this is, surprisingly, the first time that Ryuko has ever brought up reincarnation. Satsuki lifts her shoulders, noncommittal.

“No, I’m serious! Like, do you think I was dinosaur in a past life?” Ryuko asks, suddenly excited. Satsuki breathes a loud puff of short laughter.

“Oh, you’re serious,” she says, furrowing her brow. “No, you were definitely a pig in a past life.”

Ryuko just rolls her eyes. “I bet I was like, a badass ninja.”

Perhaps because eighteen was so close, the statement causes Satsuki to force down a grimace. But she reminds herself that these memories are her own, and Ryuko is just playing along with whatever comes to mind. There’s no harm in humoring her.

“Sure, maybe you were an assassin,” she says, smiling.

“I bet I fucking kicked ass,” Ryuko laughs. “I bet I kicked your ass!”

Satsuki rolls her eyes and drinks her tea. She sets it on the coffee table in front of her before making grabby hands at Ryuko, who just chuckles before getting up and straddling her hips, hooking her wrists behind Satsuki’s neck. Ryuko touches her forehead to Satsuki’s out of tenderness.

“Do you think we’d recognize each other?” she whispers, breath hot against Satsuki’s lips.

Satsuki hums, tries to compose her voice to keep the sadness at bay. “I’d always recognize you.”

“Good,” Ryuko says, closing the distance between them, threading her fingers through Satsuki’s hair. When they pull apart, Ryuko laughs. “I’m not good with faces, so you better recognize me.”

Satsuki chuckles and nudges at Ryuko’s neck with her nose before placing a kiss there.

“Ah, I chased you through this life,” Satsuki says, wrapping her arms against Ryuko’s waist and pulling away to look her in the eye. “I’ll chase you through twenty and twenty five and fifty and a hundred. I’d chase you through a hundred lives until you remembered my face.”

“Sap,” Ryuko laughs, once again closing the distance between their lips.

Every time, in every timeline, she tastes like coming home.

End Notes

This was based off of that comic I'm sure many of you have seen. It's called "25 Lives" by Tongari, and I think this is the original post, but I'm not sure:
<http://s2b2.livejournal.com/142934.html>.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!